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**BOOK REVIEW**/Arnold Beichman

# The unfriendly persuaders

Ladislav Bittman spent 14 years in Communist intelligence, two years of which were as deputy commander of the Czechoslovak disinformation department. Several days after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Mr. Bittman defected and asked the United States to grant him political asylum.

Four years later he published a book, *The Deception Game*, which described his personal experiences in disinformation activities pursued by the Soviet bloc against the West. His information is vouched for by many experts.

In his latest and terribly important book, Mr. Bittman describes the two basic types of intelligence activities.

The first is information-gathering, which seeks a wide range of classified information about an adversary — its strengths, weaknesses, plans, intentions.

The second is covert operations — or in Soviet language, "active measures." The techniques and impact of Communist active measures and disinformation are the focus of this book, which aims to explain how the Communists exploit democratic communication systems and why more effective methods are needed to protect the First Amendment against such exploitation.

"Active measures," as Mr. Bittman defines them, are clandestine operations conducted under the direction of the International Department of the Communist Party. They are the "offensive instrument of Soviet foreign policy." Their objective is systematically to disrupt relations between other nations, to discredit Soviet opponents, to influence the policies of foreign governments in favor of Soviet plans, and to turn world opinion against the "main enemy," the United States.

The CIA estimates that the Kremlin spends some $3 billion yearly to prepare and disseminate foreign propaganda and disinformation. (Disinformation is defined as "a carefully constructed false message leaked into an opponent's communication system to deceive the decision-making elite or the public.")

The author quotes a conversation in 1965 with Gen. Ivan Agayants, head of the KGB's disinformation department. After examining a collection of Mr. Bittman's news clippings from the non-Communist press attesting to the success of Soviet bloc "active measures," Gen. Agayants said, "Sometimes I am amazed how easy it is to play these games; if they did not have press freedom, we would have to invent it for them."

Writes Mr. Bittman: "Deception is a relatively easy game, particularly against anyone willing to be deceived."

That sentence explains Soviet propaganda successes from Lenin to Mikhail Gorbachev. Over seven decades there have been many people — and there still are many — in the democracies willing to be deceived and willing to lie on behalf of what was perceived to be a Higher Truth. Anyone willing to be deceived must learn how to discount the truth of what he sees and hears if it creates dissonance in his belief system.

*The KGB and Soviet Disinformation: An Insider's View*
*By Ladislav Bittman*
*Pergamon, $16.95*
*226 pages*

How successful is the KGB "active measures" strategy? Discussing Soviet disinformation, TV correspondent John Scali, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said: "The Soviets are masters at spreading rumors — I wish we were as good." The United States has failed to master what Mr. Bittman calls "the art of persuasion and disinformation" because:

1. American political culture ascribes to "propaganda a clearly negative connotation that has restricted the imagination of U.S. propagandists."

2. The West has overemphasized technology and has "minimized the important emotional appeal characteristic of every effective campaign."

3. Congressional investigations of the CIA and "an aggressive press dashed chances for the success of many operations by publicly exposing their objectives, strategy and techniques."

Systematic Soviet disinformation policies were initiated in 1959 when the Soviet KGB established a special unit called the Department for Active Measures. Two years later all Soviet-bloc secret police ministries followed suit. Together they conducted intense anti-American propaganda campaigns and intense covert operations.

Since then, Soviet active measures have, by use of forgeries and simple lies, targeted President Reagan, Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jerzy Kosinski, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, among many others. Mr. Bittman says that between 1945 and 1980, U.S. intelligence analysts traced the origins of 150 Soviet-originated forgeries planted to harm this country. Yet the 150 "are only a fraction of the total." The Soviet forgeries continue without respite, most often directed at the NATO alliance.

Latin America and "yanqui" imperialism were the target of a series of forged documents attributed to U.S. embassies south of the border, and in one case to the FBI rather than to the CIA because the Communist forgers had in their possession at the moment FBI but not CIA stationery.

One of the most important disinformation weapons is the "agent of influence," defined as an individual who occupies a leading post in governmental or non-governmental institutions in the target country and who, in one way or another, is capable of influencing either the decision-making process or public opinion or both.

The agent of influence need not be a Communist or even agree entirely with Soviet foreign policy. While it is often easy to detect Soviet-inspired disinformation propaganda, detecting the agent of influence is far more difficult. A journalist who works as a secret Soviet agent can operate for years behind the protection of the U.S. Constitution.

However, as successful as the KGB and the Soviet intelligence system is, it suffers from one weakness — defections. Mr. Bittman says that the defection rate is "staggering."

The chapters of this book, one of the most informative volumes I have read on the subject, deal with every possible aspect of Soviet disinformation policies. If only the pro-Sandinista members in Congress would read it, the world might become a safer place than it is today.

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